

# **The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Hasmonean State**

Hanan Eshel

## **Chapter Two**

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*Reviewed by Jim West*

Scholars have puzzled over the identity of the 'Man of Lies' and the 'Teacher of Righteousness' since the Scrolls were first deciphered. Eshel attempts, in this chapter to identify if not the latter, at least the former.

'I shall argue that the Wicked Priest was none other than Jonathan the Hasmonean, son of Mattathias; hence all three figures-- the Teacher of Righteousness, the Wicked Priest, and the Man of Lies-- were active in the middle of the second century BCE' (p. 30). To bolster his case he cites and exegetes (in the same manner as demonstrated in Chapter One) from the Damascus Document, the Peshar on Habakkuk (which shows that the Wicked Priest and the Teacher of Righteousness disagreed primarily about the date of the Day of Atonement) and most of all, MMT.

'Qumran scholars have disputed the identity of the Wicked Priest. Most of them agree with the proposal of Geza Vermes and Jozef Milik identifying him as Jonathan the Hasmonean' (which is of course the identification that Eshel also espouses)(p. 42). After another examination of 5 Pesharim which can be read referencing Jonathan, MMT becomes the primary focus of the remainder of the chapter and it 'provides another confirmation of the identification of the Wicked Priest with Jonathan the Hasmonean' (p. 46). 'MMT reflects the sectarians' hopes that Jonathan and his followers would adopt their strict Halakhic point of view – hopes that were dashed when Jonathan preferred the more lenient approach of the Pharisees' (p. 57).

Eshel concludes the chapter by summarizing his argument and noting 'After Jonathan's appointment, probably around 150 BCE, the Teacher of Righteousness threw his lot in with the people described in the opening lines of the Damascus Document and became their leader' (p. 60).

What rescues all of this from the hoary, dank realm of pure speculation is Eshel's acutely intelligent and careful exposition of the Qumran texts themselves. Absent that very close reading (combined with an absolute mastery of the relevant sources outside Qumran) and Eshel's work could easily be dismissed as hope, wish, and prayer. But because his suggestion is so carefully supported by the textual evidence, one can only conclude that he must be right.

Next, John Hyrcanus and his sons.